

LITERACY TO BE THING OF PAST IN KENTUCKY BY 1920, IS BELIEF

Commission Headed by Mrs.
Plans Huge Educa-
Undertaking Through-
out State

L. PRAISES WORK

PORT, Ky., Dec. 24.—As a
present to the State Illiteracy
Commission of Kentucky, N. B. Sewell,
Inspector and Examiner, today
presented a complimentary report of
work done by this department of the
during the last four years. Of the
expended, Sewell says that
\$148.23 came from the State, as
\$25,265.39 came from do-
nations raised by club women and edu-
cational enthusiasts.

Sewell says that the Kentucky Illit-
eracy Commission created by Act of the
General Assembly of 1914, was the first
of its kind in the world.
Movement which led to the estab-
lishment of this commission had its
beginning in Rowan county, Ky. In Sep-
tember, 1911, Mrs. Cora Wilson Stewart,
superintendent of schools in Rowan
county, started a movement to teach
illiterates in her home county to
read and write. At first, a few of the

public school teachers volunteered to
assist Mrs. Stewart in conducting night
schools in a number of neighborhoods
for the benefit of the adult illiterates
living in these communities. These
schools were called "moonlight schools"
because the terms were begun at a time
when the light of the moon in the early
evening would facilitate traveling to
and from the school building or the
homes in which classes met. The
novelty of this new movement in educa-
tion in the Kentucky mountains soon
attracted widespread attention, and
when it became known through the
newspapers and magazines that illit-
erates ranging from young men and young
women in their late teens or early
twenties to grandmothers and grand-
fathers in their 70's and 80's, progres-
sive citizens and school people began to
see a new light for the future of those
people in Kentucky who were eager to
read and write, but whose opportunities
had been such that they had never
learned to do so. They turned to the
county superintendent of the little
mountain county of Rowan for informa-
tion and for ideas as to the organiza-
tion of moonlight schools. In 1912, eight
other counties had organized schools
for illiterates, and in 1913 there were 25
counties in Kentucky, besides a num-
ber in other states. In February, 1914,
the Kentucky Legislature created the
Kentucky Illiteracy Commission as a
department of the State, whose function

was to eradicate adult illiteracy from
the State. The members of this com-
mission appointed by Governor Mc-
Creary in April, 1914, were Mrs. Cora
Wilson Stewart, chairman; H. H. Cher-
ry, president Western Kentucky State
Normal school; J. G. Crabbe, president
Eastern Kentucky State Normal school,
and Miss Ella Lewis, county superin-
tendent of Grayson county. The State
Superintendent of Public Instruction is
a member ex-officio. When Mr. Crabbe
left the State in 1917, he was succeed-
ed by Woodson May, who, with the
members mentioned above, constitute
the present Illiteracy Commission. Under
the law, no member of the commis-
sion is entitled to any salary, but all are
entitled to their necessary expenses
when in the actual service of the com-
mission. In the period of nearly five
years since the commission was ap-
pointed, two of the members have never
drawn any expenses and the other two
only a small part of the amount incur-
red by them in attending meetings.
From 1914 to 1916, the commission ex-
tended its work of teaching adult illit-
erates, either in schools or individually,
into many other counties of the State.
The teaching force consisted of public
school teachers and some business and
professional people who gave their serv-
ices without either salary or expenses.
No finer example of unselfish devotion
to any Kentucky cause has ever been
shown than the ungrudging work done
by the public school teachers year after
year in their endeavor to eradicate il-
literacy from the State. The number of
volunteer teachers has run from 4,000
to 6,000 per year. It is estimated that
at various times 10,000 moonlight schools
have been conducted in the State. Had
these volunteer teachers received even
the nominal wage of \$1 per evening their
contribution to the State would amount
to over one-half million dollars, or the
largest contribution ever made by any
profession or organization to any public
cause in Kentucky. It has well been
said of these unselfish teachers: "Their
heroic self-sacrifice can not be shown
in figures but ranks along side of that
of Kentucky's soldiers who have fought
so valiantly in various wars."

In 1916, the work of the Illiteracy
Commission had been carried into every
part of the State and the work done in
the moonlight schools, both in the teach-
ing of illiterates and in the cultivation
of a stronger school spirit in the peo-
ple, had so impressed both school peo-
ple and legislators that an appropriation
of \$5,000 per year for the maintenance
of the commission was made for the
period extending to the next session of
the Legislature. This appropriation and
private donations were used in organ-
izing schools and in furnishing indig-
ent adult students with necessary books,
paper, pencils, etc., and in co-operating
with the public schools of the State
along the special lines of endeavor un-
dertaken by the Illiteracy Commission.

At the session of the General Assem-
bly of 1918, the annual appropriation
for the use of the Illiteracy Commis-
sion was increased from \$5,000 to \$25,-
000 till the year 1920. During the sum-
mer and autumn just passed, an exten-
sive and intensive illiteracy campaign
has been conducted in about half the
counties of the State. In each of these
counties, an agent was employed to
organize the schools of the county and
to wipe out illiteracy as nearly as pos-
sible. These agents received \$75 per
month each and paid their own traveling
and living expenses. Thousands of
moonlight schools thus were in opera-
tion during the autumn season and it is
estimated that at this time at least
100,000 people in the State have been
taught, at least, the simpler elements
of a common school education. Accord-
ing to the 1910 census, this leaves over
100,000 illiterates in Kentucky yet to be
reached. The Illiteracy Commission, with
an excellent State-wide organization,
with a stronger sentiment in its favor
than ever before, and with more funds
at its disposal, has planned to cover
every county in the State and to reach
every illiterate that can be reached be-
fore the taking of the next census in
1920. This is a gigantic task, but the

results attained since the small begin-
ning in Rowan county eight years ago
give strong hope to those most deeply
interested that the task will be accom-
plished to such a degree that Kentucky,
in 1920, will have a very small per cent-
age of adult people who can not read
and write. Moreover, there will be re-
sults attained that can not be measured
by any test in the bringing about of a
greater zeal and stronger organization
for practical and technical education
among all classes of people living under
all kinds of conditions in all parts of the
Commonwealth.

The eradication of illiteracy is no
longer a Kentucky undertaking. A
Kentucky county superintendent con-
ceived the idea and put it into execu-
tion in the face of actual opposition, or
of scoffing from those who chose to
look upon the idea as an impractical
dream. Now more than a dozen other
states of the Union are vying with
Kentucky in the race to eliminate il-
literacy by 1920. The Federal Govern-
ment has recognized the plan as prac-
tical and is using every means to put
it into operation throughout the nation.
Mrs. Stewart, originator of the moon-
light school plan, present chairman of
the Kentucky Illiteracy Commission,
and chairman of the National Illiteracy
Commission, is devoting her entire time
to this work, as she has most unselfish-
ly for the past seven years, and is giv-
ing other states the fullest benefit pos-
sible of the plans that have been car-
ried out successfully in this State.

Of the \$37,413.81 spent by the Illit-
eracy Commission from the time of its
organization on May 5, 1914, to July 1,
1918, \$25,265.39 was received from pri-
vate donations and \$12,148.23 from the
State Treasurer.

The accounts of the commission are
handled by Superintendent V. O. Gil-
bert, who is secretary and treasurer of
the commission. The book in which he
has the accounts kept is not at all suit-
ed for this and is not complete, al-
though all receipts and disbursements
entered therein were found to be cor-
rect.

"Since Mrs. Stewart, the chairman
of the commission, approves all ac-
counts of this department and keeps on
file copies of claims approved, I think
it very proper that her office should
keep a complete account of all receipts
and disbursements properly itemized and
kept in conformity with the State's
present Uniform Accounting System.
The secretary and treasurer, of course,
should keep a proper account of all re-
ceipts and disbursements certified to
him, but the record as kept by him is
not at all adequate to show the busi-
ness of the commission," Mr. Sewell
says. "Upon the whole, there can not
be the slightest charge of extravagance
made against any of the members or
employees of the Illiteracy Commission.
Extreme economy in expenditures is evi-
denced fully by the records of the past
four years. During the two fiscal years
1914 to 1916, the sum of \$1,502.22 for
printing, supplies, etc., was paid by the
State for this commission without spec-
ific statutory authority. This seems to
have been done, however, with the ap-
proval of the Governor, the Auditor, the
Attorney General and others who had
authority either to permit or not to
permit these expenditures. Therefore,
if these expenditures for necessary
printing and supplies were authorized
and sanctioned at that time by these
State officials, I see no ground whatever
for criticism of the commission for ac-
cepting for their use in a State de-
partment these necessary supplies and
printing. Finally, I feel it only fair to
express my approval not only of the
economy in expenditures and zeal in
purpose, but of the diligent industry that
has constantly been in evidence in the
conduct of the very extensive work of
the Illiteracy Commission."